

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 6112

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR IN
SUBJECT: APPROACH BY GEORGE FERNANDES

REF: VIENNA 3194; (B) STATE 092588; (C) DELHI 5286

1. IN HIS ACTIVITIES AT THE SOCIALIST INTERNATIONAL MEETINGS WE BELIEVE THAT FERNENDES HAD A LIMITED AND GENERAL BRIEF. JUDGING FROM REF A, HE MAY HAVE EXCEEDED IT IN TONE BUT NOT CONTENT DURING HIS CONVERSATION WITH CHANCELLOR KREISKY.

2. THE FOREIGN POLICY OF THE NEW INDIAN GOVERNMENT GENERALLY EMPHASIZES CONTINUITY, BUT WITH THE ADDITIONAL OBJECTIVE OF ACHIEVING A "GENUINE" NON-ALIGNED POLICY. TO PROTECT THE BENEFITS OF INDIA'S RELATIONS WITH THE USSR, THE PRIME MINISTER IS ABLE TO UTILIZE MEMBERS OF HIS CABINET, SUCH AS DEFENSE MINISTER JAGJIVAN RAM AND CHEMICAL AND FERTILIZER MINISTER H.N. BAHUGUNA. (SEE NEW DELHI5828 FOR A REPORT OF THEIR PRAISE OF THE SOVIETS ON THE OCCASION OF THE THIRTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF INDO-SOVIET RELATIONS.) THE PRIME MINISTER IS ALSO ABLE TO USE PERSONS SUCH AS GEORGE FERNANDES, WHO ARE WELL KNOWN FOR THEIR ANTI-COMMUNISM AND CRITICAL ATTITUDE TOWARD THE SOVIETS, TO PROMOTE INDIA'S RELATIONS WITH
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THE WEST.

3. THE FOREIGN SECRETARY HAS DESCRIBED TO THE CHARGE FERNANDES' PARTICIPATION IN THE SOCIALIST INTERNATIONAL MEETING AT AMSTERDAM AS AN EXAMPLE OF HOW THE GOI WISHED TO PROMOTE AWARENESS OF THE NEW SITUATION IN INDIA. IT IS SIGNIFICANT THAT THIS INFORMATION WAS CONVEYED IN THE

CONTEXT OF THE FOREIGN SECRETARY'S DISCUSSION OF THE GOVERNMENT'S POSSIBLE DESIRE TO SEND A PRIVATE MISSION TO THE UNITED STATES TO CONDUCT SOME QUIET DIPLOMACY (NEW DELHI 5971). WE BELIEVE THE GOI IS GROPPING FOR THE BEST MEANS OF COMMUNICATING WITH THE WEST AND SEES FERNANDES'S ACTIVITIES AT THE SOCIALIST INTERNATIONAL MEETINGS AS PART OF THAT PROCESS.

4. WITH FERNANDES' BACKGROUND AS AN ANTI-COMMUNIST AND HIS REPUTATIONS AS A FLAMBOYANT AND SOMEWHAT ERRATIC PERSON, HIS COMMENTS TO KREISKY REPORTED IN REFTEL A COULD BE INTERPRETED TO SUGGEST THAT THE GOI INTENDED RADICALLY TO ALTER ITS FOREIGN POLICY. IF THIS WAS FERNANDES' MESSAGE TO KREISKY, HE CLEARLY EXCEEDED HIS BRIEF. HOWEVER, SUCH AN INTERPRETATION IN OUR OPINION IS A MISREADING OF WHAT HE SAID. HIS STATEMENT THAT INDIA DESIRED TO DISENGAGE FROM A PRO-SOVIET FOREIGN POLICY STANCE IS ON ITS FACE QUITE SIMILAR TO WHAT HIS PRIME MINISTER HAS ALREADY SAID. IT DOES NOT NECESSARILY IMPLY A LEAP INTO THE ARMS OF THE UNITED STATES, AND NOTHING IN REFTEL A INDICATES THAT FERNANDES EITHER INDIVIDUALLY OR ON BEHALF OF HIS GOVERNMENT, SUGGESTED THAT SUCH A MOVE WAS DESIRED. RATHER, WE UNDERSTAND THE CONVERSATION WITH KREISKY TURNED TO HOW THE GOI COULD BETTER COMMUNICATE WITH THE USG, A THEME WE HAVE HEARD FROM OTHER GOI OFFICIALS IN DELHI.

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